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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. HAMBURGER (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 97: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/87, A/51/131, A/51/208-S/1996/543, A/51/210, A/51/211-S/1996/551, A/51/295, A/51/357, A/51/462-S/1996/831, A/51/375; A/C.2/51/5)

(a) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/51/3 (Part II), A/51/76 and Add.1, A/51/510)

(b) SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 (continued) (A/51/420)

1. Ms. CHAVES (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that desertification and drought were global problems caused by the interaction of topographical, biological, cultural, political, social and economic factors. In order to improve the living conditions of the people affected, long-term strategies aimed at increasing agricultural productivity, rehabilitation, conservation and the sustainable use of soil and water should be implemented. At the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, States had recognized that desertification and drought were major obstacles to achieving sustainable development in developing countries. Developing countries were deeply concerned, however, that no consensus had been reached on the role and functions of the global mechanism established under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

2. The global mechanism and compliance with article 21 of the Convention were closely related. The mechanism must be sufficiently solid to facilitate the flow of resources to developing countries in accordance with their needs and the transfer of technology on preferential terms. It must play a proactive role; in that connection, political understanding and support were crucial in order for the mechanism to adjust to the enormous scale and devastating impact of desertification and drought. The Group of 77 and China hoped that a consensus would be reached at the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, to be held in January 1997.

3. She expressed concern at the fact that the industrialized countries had not incorporated the environmental and human measures set forth in the Convention in their national policies. The Group of 77 and China therefore looked forward to the entry into force of the Convention on 26 December 1996 as a means of ensuring a firm commitment by the international community. They also welcomed the progress achieved since the adoption of Agenda 21, particularly regarding chapter 12, on desertification and drought.

4. Mr. O'CONNELL (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associate countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and Iceland,

said that the adoption of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was one of the major achievements in the area of sustainable development following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Union, the associate countries he had named and Iceland warmly welcomed the entry into force of the Convention during the current session of the General Assembly and noted with satisfaction that the first Conference of the Parties would take place in September 1997 in Rome. They also welcomed the action being taken by the parties even before the entry into force of the Convention and would continue to cooperate with countries affected by desertification.

5. During its tenth session, to be held in January 1997, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee should attempt to reach an agreement on the functions of the global mechanism and identify an organization to house the mechanism and the permanent secretariat. The European Union, the associate countries named and Iceland were confident that the negotiating process would be successfully concluded during the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee.

6. Mr. PEDRAZA (Bolivia), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group countries - Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica (on behalf of Central America), Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, said that the Rio Group attached great importance to the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Group welcomed its imminent ratification and the progress achieved thus far by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. One of the major outstanding questions concerned the establishment of the global mechanism provided for in article 21, paragraph 4, of the Convention. The global mechanism would play a vital role in the implementation of the provisions of the Convention and its four regional annexes. It must ensure the existence of diverse sources of financing for activities carried out at the national level within the framework of the Convention. Financing options might actually be reduced if it were merely a clearing house. It was therefore essential that the global mechanism should have resources of its own and the capacity to mobilize adequate and substantial financial resources, including new and additional sources of financing. The Rio Group believed that the functions of the mechanism should be defined before identifying an institution to house it.

7. The global nature of desertification - it affected approximately 1 billion people occupying one third of the earth's surface - reaffirmed the importance of the effective implementation of each of the regional annexes to the Convention. Urgent action must be taken in Africa, and desertification and drought were also serious problems in Latin America.

8. The relationship between poverty and environmental degradation was becoming increasingly critical. In many of the Rio Group countries, the phenomenon had resulted in an increased number of internally displaced persons, the abandonment of rural areas, a decrease in arable land, overcrowded cities, increased levels of malnutrition and a rise in infant mortality. As reaffirmed by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session, in 1995, desertification was an economic and social problem which also had an impact on biological diversity, climate change, water resources, deforestation, the exploitation of resources, the terms of trade, food security and population growth. Integral treatment of

the problem was imperative; problems in all regions must be addressed without delay.

9. The States members of the Rio Group held ongoing regional consultations and debates relating to the Convention. In 1996, they had also held two regional conferences on the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Final Act of the most recent conference, held in Mexico City in June 1996, was contained in document A/AC.241/61.

10. Mr. NÁTHON (Hungary) expressed his delegation's full support for the statement delivered by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the European Union. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 would be the most important international event in the field of human-centred sustainable development since the Rio Conference. Preparatory work for the special session should reflect the diverse approaches taken to sustainable development at the international, regional, national and local levels.

11. He welcomed the consensus reached by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session, namely that the special session should not attempt to renegotiate Agenda 21 and other intergovernmental agreements, but rather should focus on their continued implementation. Hungary would cooperate fully in order to enable the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Inter-sessional Working Group and the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development to complete the preparations for the special session. Convinced that participation in the special session should be at the highest possible level, Hungary supported the European Union's proposal that it should coincide with the Summit of the Group of Seven (G7) industrialized nations in June 1997. The adoption of a declaration would reflect the importance of the event more effectively than agreed conclusions. Since environmental issues were global in nature, the special session should not become a forum for North-South debate. The outcomes of other global conferences should be taken into account during the preparatory process.

12. In the final phase of its transition to a market economy, Hungary had accorded priority to the formulation of a new environmental policy. The Hungarian National Commission on Sustainable Development was a dynamic interministerial body; its annual reports were also submitted to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. A National Environmental Council had also been established. Those bodies, in close cooperation with the Ministry for Environment and Regional Policy, were coordinating intersectoral activities in the field of the environment.

13. Hungary also attached great importance to international environmental conventions. It had ratified both the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and its experts were active in the Conferences of the Parties to those conventions. It had already begun preparatory work for ratification of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In conclusion, he drew the Committee's attention to a report entitled "Hungary: Towards Strategy Planning for Sustainable Development".

14. Mr. GHANKHUYAG (Mongolia) fully supported the statement delivered by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Mongolia, one of the first countries to sign the Convention to Combat Desertification, was pleased that a growing number of countries were choosing to ratify it. A predominantly dryland country, Mongolia had a special interest in the Convention's early entry into force. It welcomed the comprehensive approach to environmental problems outlined in Agenda 21 and looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly to review its implementation. It also welcomed the fact that the Convention addressed the underlying causes of desertification, including environmental and socio-economic factors. The Conference of the Parties to the Convention, to be held in 1997, would provide an opportunity for the international community to take concerted action to combat desertification.

15. Science and technology played a vital role in increasing crop varieties, preserving biodiversity, understanding the relationship between climate and desertification, developing techniques for reducing energy demand and achieving more efficient water use, all of which were necessary in order to ensure more effective management of drylands. Thus, Mongolia attached great importance to the proposed programme of work of the Committee on Science and Technology and hoped that the Committee would be established at the earliest possible date. Mongolia also believed that the global mechanism should play a key role in the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources, including the transfer of technology on preferential terms. It hoped that, at the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Mechanism, a consensus would be reached on that vital issue and on the permanent secretariat of the Convention.

16. One third of Mongolia's territory was desert and more than 70 per cent of its pastures and half of its cropland had been degraded. That, in turn had reduced agricultural productivity and affected the nation's socio-economic development. In an effort to address development and environmental issues simultaneously, Mongolia was implementing a National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification, a Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan and a Programme of Protected Areas. Those initiatives required national capacity-building, the acquisition of technology and financial and technical cooperation from developed countries and international organizations.

17. Mr. BIAOU (Benin) expressed satisfaction that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification would enter into force in December 1996; much work, however, remained to be done. The desertification process must be checked in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid dry zones; degraded land and drylands must be regenerated; and a drought early-warning system must be set up. Poverty reduction would also be crucial to combating drought and desertification.

18. It was regrettable that negotiations on the role and functions of the global mechanism had been stalled during the ninth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee because of a conflict of views between the developed and the developing countries. It was equally regrettable that the developed countries refused to acknowledge the global mechanism as a means of mobilizing resources for developing countries, particularly the African countries. The developed countries, despite their official positions and declarations, applied a double standard to the question of the financing mechanism for the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. The United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity had a financing mechanism, namely, the Global Environment Facility (GEF); the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol also had one, namely the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol. The insistence of certain developed countries that the Convention to Combat Desertification should be financed from bilateral cooperation alone was therefore incomprehensible. He urged all parties to the negotiations to show goodwill during the tenth and eleventh sessions of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. The survival of approximately 1 billion human beings in some 100 countries was at stake; more than 90 per cent of those countries were developing countries.

19. His delegation supported the recommendation of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to the General Assembly that, within the framework of administrative support to the interim secretariat, it should include the first and second sessions of the Conference of the Parties and its subsidiary bodies in the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1997-1998. That would ensure financing from the regular United Nations budget until 31 December 1998, which would allow the permanent secretariat of the Convention the time it needed to obtain its own financial resources. Support must be given to the establishment of the secretariat of the Convention and to increasing public awareness of the specific activities outlined in the various programmes of action.

20. At the interregional level, the Afro-Asian Forum on Cooperation in Combating Desertification and/or Mitigating the Effects of Drought had been held in August 1996 in Beijing, China, with the support of the Government of Japan and in cooperation with the Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and Least Developed Countries of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the interim secretariat of the Convention. The Forum had adopted a Framework of Action for Afro-Asian Cooperation in Combating Desertification and/or Mitigating the Effects of Drought. He hoped that the international community would contribute to the successful implementation of the Framework for Action, a new instrument of South-South cooperation. The participants in the Forum had spent three days on a field visit to Baoutsu, Inner Mongolia, in order to witness China's successful efforts in combating desertification.

21. At the national level, Benin was the third African country, after Mali and Cape Verde, to have organized a national forum on the elaboration of a National Programme of Action to Combat Desertification. The Forum had been held in August 1996 at Parakou, in northern Benin, the part of the country most affected by desertification and drought. He expressed appreciation to Germany, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the interim secretariat of the Convention for their contributions and invited other development partners of Benin to support the elaboration and implementation of its Programme of Action.

22. Benin, one of the first 50 countries to ratify the Convention to Combat Desertification, urged all countries which had not yet done so to ratify it at the earliest possible date.

23. Mr. HEDRICH (Germany) said that the Convention to Combat Desertification had led to a new type of partnership in the search for a solution to a pressing

development problem. In the light of its extensive experience in that area, and to express its readiness for active cooperation within the framework of that Convention, Germany had invited the secretariat of the Convention to relocate to Bonn and had offered financial and logistical support. Proximity to the secretariat of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which had moved there recently, was a point in favour of that decision.

24. At the special session of the General Assembly to review Agenda 21, all States must give account of the concrete measures they had taken to change patterns of resource management and consumption. Poverty was an important cause of non-sustainable management of resources, and therefore, from an environmental perspective, the fight against poverty was also a valid goal. The Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had produced international awareness of the vulnerable situation of that specific group of States. In the context of the special session, he could foresee a discussion on progress made in that area as well.

25. Mr. BACHARD (Niger) said that, while natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods could not be prevented beforehand, that was not true for drought and desertification - methods already existed for successfully combating their effects. The Niger was among those States suffering from deforestation, drought and desertification, which weakened the national means of production. There was no question that the environment and the integral development of any community were related, and that ecosystems interacted between States. Some ecological situations, like desertification, worked in the same way as contagious diseases among humans. If one State could not arrest the desertification threatening it, inevitably it would affect its neighbour. Common problems called for common solutions; only international solidarity could bring about an end to environmental problems.

26. The Niger once again called for improvements in the information and communications mechanisms within the United Nations system. Every possible medium should be used to raise awareness of the need for environmental protection and improvement.

27. The global mechanism established to promote the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification should have as its main task the mobilization of adequate financial resources. His delegation intended to propose during the preparations for the special session that the establishment by each Member State of a "solidarity tax" for environmental protection should be considered. Half of the amount collected in each State would go to a national solidarity fund for environmental protection, and the other half would be placed in an international environmental protection fund which would be managed by the General Assembly.

28. Finally, his delegation had welcomed the statement by the representative of the World Bank regarding its investment in environmental protection. The Niger hoped that financial institutions would give priority to the problems of drought and desertification, since proven solutions did exist.

29. Ms. HOMANOVS'KA (Ukraine) said that the special session would help the international community to abandon traditional ways of thinking and increase a

sense of common moral responsibility to find solutions to environmental problems. The preparatory process itself, with the participation of Governments, international institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, would bring those goals closer. Regional activities such as the conference on the sustainable development of countries in transition, to be held in Minsk, Belarus, would also play an important role in preparations for the session.

30. Her delegation agreed that the special session should not attempt to renegotiate Agenda 21 or redefine the principles and objectives of sustainable development. It should focus on such priorities as land degradation, including the results of human activity, transfer of environmentally sound technology, new and innovative sources of funding and involvement of the private sector. The Commission on Sustainable Development had proven its ability to manage the follow-up of the Rio Conference, and the special session should consider the Commission's future role, with a view to extending its mandate and making it a principal body for dealing with sustainable development issues.

31. In demonstrating its support for the concept of sustainable development, Ukraine had ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, while the Copenhagen Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was in the process of ratification. A national environmental protection policy had also been adopted. Ukraine continued to deal daily with problems related to the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident, which consumed 12 per cent of the State budget. It appreciated the assurances in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/51/1) that the United Nations remained deeply concerned by the consequences of Chernobyl and was committed to pursuing measures aimed at their alleviation. It hoped that the international community would continue to assist in creating the conditions that would allow Ukraine to decommission the Chernobyl nuclear power plant by the year 2000.

32. Mr. OJIMBA (Nigeria) said that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of a Convention to Combat Desertification had concluded its ninth session without reaching an agreement on the issue of the global mechanism, which was the core element in its implementation. His delegation hoped that the issues concerning that mechanism could be resolved at the forthcoming session in January 1997.

33. Desertification was closely linked to hunger and poverty, and consequently, the priority in combating desertification should be the urgent implementation of preventive measures for lands that were not yet degraded. Those measures should include integrated development programmes for the eradication of poverty and the promotion of alternative livelihood systems in areas prone to desertification. It was urgent that the international community and the donor countries should mobilize adequate resources to support the activities in affected developing countries, particularly in Africa.

34. Nigeria was fully aware that the initiative to combat desertification rested with national Governments, but the need for concerted international action had become critical. Several African countries, including Nigeria, had initiated programmes for the implementation of the Convention to Combat

Desertification. They had undertaken those activities despite inadequate resources and lack of technology. Nigeria attached great importance to the Convention to Combat Desertification and, while awaiting the first Conference of the Parties, hoped that the Convention would enjoy universal support through the provision of necessary financial resources and appropriate technology.

35. Mr. CHUNG (Republic of Korea) said that, although only limited progress had been made in the fields of finance and technology transfer, the greatest success of Agenda 21 had been its profound impact in raising awareness, reshaping perceptions and elevating the profile and priorities of sustainable development, both at the national and international levels. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, convened at a time when the Republic of Korea's high rate of economic growth was beginning to level off, had given his Government an opportunity to re-evaluate its traditional approach to economic growth and development. The impact of the Rio Conference had not been confined just to government policies; it had also changed attitudes towards environmental concerns in the minds of the public. In 1995, the Republic of Korea had become the first country to introduce a nationwide volume-based domestic waste collection system. The public had embraced the new system, showing a 99 per cent compliance rate. With such broad public participation, the new waste collection system had reduced domestic waste by 40 per cent in only six months. If the attitudes of the general public could change so broadly, it should be much easier to change government policies.

36. The Republic of Korea had learned three key lessons in the course of implementing Agenda 21. First, as a country which had experienced an intense period of economic development, it had come to realize that incorporating the concept of sustainability into a development strategy from an early stage was far better than applying a "develop first and clean up later" approach. A second lesson was that the Government bureaucracy was not properly organized to tackle the issue of sustainable development. Most Governments had an environment ministry and a development ministry, but few had a sustainable development ministry. Similarly, in the United Nations system, it was mainly ministers of the environment who participated in the Commission on Sustainable Development, yet the issues addressed had ranged across the whole gamut of public policy. Ensuring the success of sustainability required the involvement of other ministers as well.

37. A third lesson was the need to pursue sustainable consumption patterns. It had become particularly pressing in the light of the increasingly widespread application of the market mechanism which cultivated a culture of mass production and consumption.

38. With regard to desertification, his delegation welcomed the imminent entry into force of the Convention to Combat Desertification. It was essential that, during the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, final decisions should be made on remaining issues, including the establishment of a financial mechanism and arrangements for the permanent secretariat. As a country which had successfully overcome severe deforestation in the early stages of its economic development, the Republic of Korea would contribute to the struggle against desertification by sharing its own experience of reforestation with the other parties to the Convention.

39. Mr. ABDELLATIF (Egypt) said that, nearly five years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the lack of an overall common vision of environmental problems was preventing the implementation of Agenda 21, which had been intended to address the problems of the environment and of development. There was a tendency, however, to concentrate on the environmental aspect and to overlook the more important question of the relationship between environment and sustainable development.

40. The subject of combating poverty, as included in Agenda 21, had not received due attention in spite of the close relationship between poverty in the developing countries and the deterioration of the environment and of natural resources. In order to make a reality of sustainable development, poverty had to be eradicated so as to prevent natural resources from being overexploited merely to provide for people's basic needs. No strategy had yet been devised to address that problem.

41. The failure to honour financial obligations under Agenda 21 made it difficult for the developing countries, especially the least developed among them, to build up their national capacities to achieve sustainable development.

42. The issues of the environment and development required a global rather than a selective approach; for the developing countries, the eradication of poverty, together with economic and social development, remained the first priorities and should be an integral part of the strategy for sustainable development.

43. His country had participated in the negotiations on the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility and on the replenishment of its resources at the end of the pilot phase of its operation. His delegation was, however, concerned at the slow pace at which financial resources were being made available to fund the incremental cost of the projects coming under the focal areas of the Facility's activities.

44. The combating of desertification was vital for many developing countries but there was a tendency to place less emphasis on that issue than on other environmental problems. As desertification had a direct impact on many populations for which it was a daily problem, it was important that the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification should be properly funded through a global financing mechanism.

45. His country had both signed and ratified the Convention and called on other States to do so. Its implementation would have a positive impact on the lives of large numbers of people and would heighten awareness of environmental issues. His delegation hoped that the tenth session of the International Negotiating Committee, which was to be held in New York in January 1997, would reach agreement on the creation of a global mechanism for the provision of financial resources for the implementation of the Convention.

46. Mr. AL-SULTAN (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that the Convention to Combat Desertification was the first international agreement to address poverty and environmental degradation in rural areas. In contrast to the other environmental conventions since Rio, the direct beneficiaries of that instrument were the hundreds of millions of predominantly

poor people without food security who populated the drylands of the world. It was also the first convention to cast resource users and their communities as the central part of the solution rather than the problem.

47. There was a strong confluence between the provisions of the Convention and IFAD operations for poverty eradication in dryland areas. IFAD was already supporting countries in the early stages of implementing the Convention through the formulation of investment projects at the local level, including projects that attempted to provide an enabling environment in which farmers could help themselves, including the development of rural financial systems, demand-driven technology development, and decentralized institutions for community action. As called for by the Convention, a major thrust had been to build on traditional knowledge. In the Niger, for instance, testing and improving traditional soil and water conservation techniques had resulted in substantial improvements in yield. They were simple, cheap and easily replicated and had been widely adopted outside the project area.

48. The Convention recognized the central importance of financing as a complement to policy and institutional reform. The most important role for the global mechanism was to promote actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources to developing country parties. The multiple source approach, as opposed to banking on one single financial mechanism, was one of the great strengths of the Convention. That configuration would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing resource flows in addition to finding new sources. It would encourage a greater role for domestic resources, private-sector initiative and a blend of concessional and non-concessional external finance. The global mechanism should be a catalyst and innovator in financial opportunities for sustainable dryland development. It must foster innovations in blending public and private finance and must have a privileged relationship with one or more financing institutions that could provide resources to act as a catalyst to investment.

49. Mr. MEROUANE (Algeria) said that the Algerian Government and civil society had assigned the highest priority to working together to combat desertification in Algeria. The very survival and sustainable development of many population groups throughout the world were threatened by the devastating impact of desertification. The United Nations should therefore accord the issue the attention it deserved. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the growing interest in the Convention to Combat Desertification not only in Africa but also in the other continents, and he called on the remaining signatories to ratify it. The international community gave the impression that it was not sufficiently interested in the Convention, which was an integral part of the Rio process. In his view, the entire international community must show its commitment to the Convention, which was extremely crucial as it would help to preserve fragile ecosystems and lands that constituted the sole source of survival for entire populations. In that context, the World Food Summit would shed additional light on the intricate relationship between combating desertification and agricultural development.

50. The Convention's success would depend on the resources made available by the international community to that end. In his view, the global mechanism should play a central role in the implementation of the Convention. He called

on all international organizations to provide support for, and become involved in, combating desertification.

51. Mr. MANOR (Israel) said that his Government attached great importance to the implementation of Agenda 21 and to a successful and productive special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise progress achieved since the Rio Conference. Since the issues of desertification and climate change recognized no national boundaries, they required global and regional solutions, based on close cooperation and partnership between nations and peoples.

52. Sixty per cent of his country's land area was covered by desert. Israel had developed expertise that had transformed the desert into a habitable, food-producing environment as well as an industrial and tourism centre. It had shared its experience in that field with countries in the Middle East, as well as in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In that context, it had established an international centre for combating desertification, which was engaged in all areas of desert research. The knowledge gained at the centre would be shared with the whole world.

53. Israel had also held a symposium on sustainable water management in arid and semi-arid regions the previous year, which had been attended by experts from 30 developing countries. Since his Government attached great importance to the three environmental conventions, it was planning a workshop to examine closer coordination between the International Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

54. Mr. ODEVALL (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, said that deposit of the fiftieth instrument of ratification by Chad had ensured the entry into force of the Convention before the end of the current year. Apart from the satisfactory ratification profile, covering countries from all parts of the world, a number of countries were speeding up their ratification procedures in order to be ready in time for the first session of the Conference of Parties to be held in the latter half of 1997. Both the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility had stressed that, in view of the Convention's emphasis on empowerment and participation at the local level, they would take decisive steps to support its implementation. The ninth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee had included a special panel discussion on women, which had clearly demonstrated that the role of women in agricultural production placed them at the very heart of the Convention.

55. A number of administrative issues remained to be settled. Among them was the location of the secretariat and the institution which could support its services. A contact group had been established to ensure that the selection process would be rational and fair. He hoped that Governments would be able to come up with an innovative solution with regard to the need for continued negotiation on financial issues, in particular the functions of the global mechanism and the organization which should host it.

56. Concerning the meetings of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee during 1997, the possibility of holding one more session pursuant to the relevant General Assembly resolution would be used only if there was a strongly perceived need. As for the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Rio Conference, he was convinced that, whatever action was decided on the important issue of freshwater, the Convention would play a major supporting role. Indeed, the effectiveness of the Convention would be judged on its capacity to improve food security and living conditions of people in the drylands.

57. Ms. AKICHEVA (Kazakstan) said that her country suffered from a very acute shortage of water stemming from a very uneven distribution of surface flow, a steady decline in transit river flow and accelerating desertification. With the support of the Interim Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification, her Government had undertaken a number of preparatory activities to combat desertification, submitted a report thereon to relevant United Nations bodies and other specialized agencies and international organizations and had secured support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for the drafting of a national action plan to combat desertification.

58. Kazakstan's current economic crisis was heightening the already unfavourable environmental conditions and was aggravating social tension. It was also hampering work on the national action plan to combat desertification and the efforts being made to increase public awareness of problems associated with land degradation and desertification.

59. Kazakstan was interested in promoting cooperation in a number of areas, namely, the protection of the territory near the Aral Sea from dust storms and salt drifts, the realization of effective technological measures to rehabilitate desert pastures, forest reclamation on the dry seabed of the Aral Sea, and the rehabilitation of ecological zones in the drought-affected areas. Her delegation believed that cooperation in the area of ecology should become one of the top priorities of the United Nations.

60. Mr. MAPURANGA (Zimbabwe) said that his country attached enormous importance to issues concerning the environment and sustainable development. In that regard, while his delegation valued the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora as an important universal instrument for the conservation of biodiversity in general, and endangered species in particular, it believed that the Convention had become over-politicized and unbalanced. Zimbabwe, like a number of southern African countries, was opposed to the ban on the ivory trade because its thriving elephant herd was straining the carrying capacity of the national game parks and posing a real threat to the habitat. In his delegation's view, countries that had demonstrated a capacity for sustainable utilization of their natural resources deserved to enjoy the fruits of their efforts. His delegation looked forward to sharing its experience in balancing animal conservation and the preservation of the habitat with commercial gain, with participants at the forthcoming conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

61. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, particularly in industrialized countries, had contributed to numerous environmental problems

including the possibility of successive years of drought in the southern African region, which had increased the chances of desertification.

62. The adoption of the World Solar Programme had clearly demonstrated the realism with which Africans faced the future. The selection and use of cleaner and environmentally friendly types of energy sources was more urgent than ever before. He hoped that a financial mechanism for the implementation of the World Solar Programme would be identified in the follow-up to the World Solar Summit. Since fossil-based fuels had a finite lifespan, humankind's best bet for survival would be to invest in solar energy, which was infinite.

63. Mr. ELTINAY (Sudan) said that his country ascribed the greatest importance to sustainable development and had ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. His country had also participated in all stages of the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, including the preparations for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/112. His delegation hoped that the Committee, at its forthcoming tenth session, would complete its consideration of the remaining items on its agenda so that the Convention could enter into force. His country had taken measures to combat drought and desertification and to protect the environment in the interest of sustainable development. In that context it had, in particular, established a Ministry for the Environment and Tourism and had made efforts to promote awareness of the importance of environmental issues, particularly in connection with the forest resources of the country.

64. In order to implement the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, his country had acceded to the Convention on Biological Diversity and had organized numerous seminars and workshops to prepare a related national plan. In that connection, a number of national projects, and a subregional project on the development of the Red Sea environment, had been set up.

65. His country attached importance to the link between the decisions of the Rio Conference and Agenda 21, on the one hand, and subsequent decisions by international conferences, particularly those designed to combat and eradicate poverty, on the other. Its action to give effect to such decisions always took account of the importance of the environment, emphasizing, in particular, the development of traditional technologies and the use of solar energy in rural areas in order to conserve forests and natural resources.

66. In the context of the importance it attached to the environment and development in accordance with the Rio commitments, his country, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme, had embarked on a comprehensive environmental legislative programme in order to bring the Sudan's environmental protection legislation into harmony with the content of international conventions and the Rio commitments.

67. His delegation attached exceptional importance to the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, which should take into consideration what had been agreed on at international conferences, including the forthcoming World Food Summit, which his delegation hoped would provide radical solutions to the problems of food security and the causes of poverty.

68. Like other developing countries, the Sudan had honoured its commitments in the framework of the Rio Conference, and Agenda 21. What was needed now, in the view of his delegation, was the political will on the part of all parties, particularly with respect to the provision of resources, in order to create a world community enjoying sustainable development and a healthy environment for the benefit of all humankind. In that connection, his delegation endorsed the representative of Costa Rica's statement on behalf of the Group of 77 concerning agenda items 97 (a) and (b).

69. Ms. REBONG (Philippines) said that her Government, which attached the utmost importance to the issue of sustainable development and environment, had recently decided not to approve the building and operation of a cement complex, which would have produced 1,000 jobs and increased export earnings, because the proposed site was a world-class marine sanctuary.

70. Her Government believed that the eradication of poverty was the most important challenge to sustainable development. In that regard, it had proposed a blueprint for the country's sustainable development which included initiatives such as the social reform agenda to combat poverty, a 10-year investment plan for the health sector and the launching of the Philippine biodiversity study to improve planning and management of the country's biodiversity. It had also begun to implement a broad-based coastal area management training programme to develop the capacity to properly manage the country's coastal resources and had decided to actively participate in the International Coral Reef Initiative. It recognized the role that major groups such as concerned non-governmental organizations, women, marine scientists and fishermen played in sustainable development and had accorded them an appropriate place in its decision-making process. She was confident that eco-tourism, one of the more recent initiatives of her Government, would prove that economic growth and the protection of the environment were mutually reinforcing.

71. Her delegation had great expectations for the special session. Four years after the Rio Conference and following four sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the international community must be in a position to reach agreement on result-oriented solutions instead of identifying the problems once again. Her delegation agreed that all relevant players must participate in and contribute to the session. In that regard, the Philippines was particularly interested in the participation of the private sector, especially in the area of the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. For a more meaningful and fruitful special session, the Secretariat and development partners should make the utmost efforts to find ways to financially support the participation of developing countries, especially the least developed ones.

72. The success of Agenda 21 depended to a large extent on how effectively the three Conventions resulting from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development were implemented. By the same token, it would be unproductive if the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States did not receive appropriate support from the members of the international community. Indeed, half-hearted support for the problems of small island developing States and those affected by desertification and drought would put in doubt the future of sustainable development.

73. It was important to accord equal attention to the threefold objective of the Convention on Biodiversity. She shared the view that the operational strategy adopted by the Global Environment Facility did not fully reflect that objective.

74. In view of the enormous negative effects of natural disasters on the economic and social development of countries, national, regional and international programmes for sustainable development should always take into consideration activities for disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation. Her delegation therefore supported the integration of the Yokahama Strategy for a Safer World and Yokahama Plan of Action, with the coordinated implementation and follow-up of the recommendations of major United Nations conferences. It was also critical to promote and facilitate the transfer of technologies related to early warning to the developing countries, in particular those that were prone to natural disasters.

75. Mr. RI GWANG NAM (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China under agenda item 97 (b).

76. In order to implement Agenda 21 in a satisfactory manner, it was imperative to create conditions for environmental protection and sustainable development at both the national and international levels and ensure compliance with common but differentiated responsibilities. It was regrettable that the commitments that had been made under Agenda 21 had not yet been met. In particular, the question of financial resources and the transfer of environmentally sound technology remained unresolved. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1997 would provide an opportunity to take action-oriented measures to contribute to the substantial implementation of Agenda 21 by developing countries, as well as to review the progress achieved in its implementation.

77. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea had formulated its own national strategy to implement Agenda 21 and was cooperating closely with many countries and international organizations. It had already deposited its instruments of ratification of the Convention on Biodiversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

78. Mr. JABBARY (Islamic Republic of Iran), Vice-Chairman, said that the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held in January 1997, would probably be the last preparatory session of that Committee before the convening of the first Conference of the Parties. That session would therefore provide an opportunity to reach a consensus on outstanding issues. In particular, the negotiations on the global mechanism posed a major challenge to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. While the developing countries considered that the global mechanism should serve as an engine for mobilizing and channelling resources to affected developing countries, others had emphasized the need to mobilize domestic resources. What was needed most at the current stage was a demonstration of the political will to provide an effective international response for improving international development and the global environment.

79. With a total land area of 164 million hectares of which 80 per cent was arid or semi-arid, the Islamic Republic of Iran was one of the developing countries most affected by desertification and drought. Its deserts accounted for 34 million hectares with an average rainfall of 50 millimetres. The Islamic Republic of Iran had allocated a great deal of resources to control desertification and had taken measures to increase public awareness, decrease migration to urban areas through the social and economic development of rural areas, protect the environment and rehabilitate degraded lands, stabilize sand dunes and encourage public participation.

80. At the regional and international levels, following negotiations with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a programme office of the Desertification Control Research and Training Network for Asia and the Pacific (DESCONAP) had been established in Tehran. The Office was involved in the preparation of a national action programme, research, training and extension on desertification control. The Islamic Republic of Iran had also been involved in implementing projects in various neighbouring countries, organizing training courses for experts, and exchanging of information and experience. The DESCONAP Programme Office in Tehran was well placed to become the regional institution for the implementation of the Convention in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran had indicated its willingness to host the second regional conference on the implementation of the Convention in Asia.

81. Mr. NAMAKANDO (Zambia) said that his delegation had not been impressed with the pace of negotiations in the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. Sufficient political will had been lacking, especially with regard to finance and institutional arrangements. The ninth session of the Intergovernmental Committee had failed to reach consensus on issues that should have been reached at the eighth session. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee would therefore have to finalize all major outstanding issues at its tenth session.

82. His delegation fully supported the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/51/186-E/1996/80). Until the end of the Decade, emphasis should be placed on the implementation of the International Framework of Action rather than on administrative preparation arrangements for the close of the Decade. The implementation process should be broadened to include all parties concerned, and the secretariat of the Decade should be strengthened. In that regard, his delegation supported the Trust Fund for the Decade and urged all those in a position to do so to donate generously to the fund.

83. His delegation endorsed the statement made by Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, in particular their appeal for financial assistance. The development of a vulnerability index should be undertaken and completed as soon as possible since such an index could also be relevant to other developing countries, especially the landlocked and least developed countries.

84. His delegation was pleased with the institutional progress that had been made with respect to the Convention on Biodiversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change. High priority should be accorded to the mobilization,

management and allocation of financial resources to fulfil the objectives of those conventions. Resources were required for policy and programme development and execution. Equally important was the development of synergies at the national level to harmonize action on those conventions with the outcome of other conferences.

85. The special session of the General Assembly should not renegotiate Agenda 21 but rather should seek modalities to enhance its implementation. Such efforts should concentrate on mobilizing the necessary technical and financial resources. Assistance should be provided to developing countries in order to enable them to participate in the preparations for the special session and in the special session itself.

86. Mr. OCHOA (Bolivia) said that his delegation was pleased that, in its resolution 50/113, the General Assembly had decided that the Commission on Sustainable Development should serve as the intergovernmental centre for preparations for the Assembly's special session in June 1997 to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21. The same resolution invited Governments to consider undertaking reviews of progress achieved in the area of sustainable development. In that regard, Bolivia had developed a programmatic proposal centred on the concept of sustainable development. Bolivia had also been one of the first countries to establish a special Ministry of Sustainable Development, with broad coordinating powers over other sectors of the economy and society.

87. Capacity 21 was the principal multilateral alternative for building countries' capacities to implement Agenda 21. In Bolivia, Capacity 21 had helped strengthen the new Ministry of Sustainable Development and support the decentralization efforts in Bolivia's nine departments. The Bolivian model for sustainable development, widely known and recognized for its popular participation component, would not have been possible without the sustained efforts of the Bolivian people and multilateral and bilateral cooperation. Bolivia's Agenda 21, prepared with the support of Capacity 21, would be presented at the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, to be held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in December 1996.

88. The implementation of Agenda 21 at the global level still required much effort. The existence of such initiatives as Capacity 21, which was currently operating in 40 other countries, could help mobilize internal resources, such as those Bolivia had mobilized through its experience of popular participation for local communities, and make possible the spirit of community that had existed in Rio.

89. Mr. DIALLO (Executive Secretary, Interim Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification) said that, at the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, agreement should be reached on the operation of the global mechanism, which was essential for the implementation of the Convention. So far, 54 countries had ratified the Convention: 25 African countries, 12 Asian countries, 5 Latin American countries and 12 members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). He hoped that the Convention would receive the earliest possible backing from all affected countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, countries of the northern

Mediterranean and other affected European countries and by all development partners that were members of OECD.

90. He was quite satisfied with the progress that had been made by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and hoped that, at its tenth session, the Committee would be able to maintain its spirit of cooperation that had enabled it to demonstrate that the international community was ready to seek solutions to the problems of desertification and drought.

91. Mr. NYANDI (United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office) said that the countries affected by desertification and drought viewed the entry into force of an international convention to combat desertification and drought as a major milestone, and there was a need for a new impetus at the country level. However, so far action to support the efforts of affected countries had not been sufficient. He therefore urged those countries in a position to do so to provide assistance in order to ensure a significant increase in country-level activities before the first Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

92. In order to be effective and fulfil the expectations of the parties, the global mechanism had to be put on a sound footing. Therefore the discussions to be held in January 1997 on the functions and tasks of the global mechanism were critical.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.